

KIMO CHAMBERLAIN



Smiling Kimo Chamberlain first appeared at the Fox in 1975 when he was 14.

Kimo attended the Paideia School and roved the neighborhood on his unicycle.



Kimo and his family lived at 364 4th Street, right behind the new Shrine Temple.



Kimo at Paideia School in 1977.



By the time Kimo was 17, he was a Fox employee and signed the [petition to oust General Manager Ted Stevens](#) in 1978.

FOX VOLUNTEERS' REPORT MARCH 1978	
<u>James R Chamberlain</u>	<u>364 4th</u>
KIMO CHAMBERLAIN	<u>874 - 1890</u>
	<u>Volunteer/employee</u>

By the time he was 19, Kimo had opened a neon shop in Buckhead, the article below revealing he has spent the intervening years as an actor. "We just want to make it where everybody can have a piece of neon," he sighed.

BUSINESS

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 10/07/1982

Light up your life with Deco Neon's flashy wares

NEON



"We just want to make it where everybody can have a piece of neon and have it at a good price," said Todd Sokal who, with partner James Chamberlain, owns Deco Neon in Buckhead. (Photo - Beverly Barnes)

From custom-made lips to flamingos, store is trying to put neon in homes

By BEVERLY BARNES

Reporter, Interview EXTRA

While a number of interesting art shops dot the busy streets of Buckhead, none is quite like the store almost hidden away at 3101-A Peachtree Road. After all, where else can you get personalized glow-in-the-dark lips large enough to hang on your wall?

If Deco Neon isn't the only place, it is certainly one of the few.

Shop-owner Todd Sokal said he and his partner have only done one such piece to date, and he explained how it happened.

"This little rich girl came in one day wanting a pair of lips done up in neon. But she didn't want just any lips, she wanted her own," he said. "So we had her kiss a piece of paper until we got a clear outline. And then we put her lips in neon."

Sokal and James "Kimo" Chamberlain are partners in what they call the city's first retail neon store. They have been open for business since Dec. 1, 1981.

The two consider themselves neon artists and look forward to the day when they ideally produce 60 percent of their work for retail consumption and 40 percent for commercial customers. Right now that statistic is reversed.

Chamberlain said this view of themselves as artists sets him and Sokal apart from most other "glass benders" in Atlanta.

"They're into signs," he said. "They're not into art at all. When you take an old neon-maker a cactus or a flamingo (two of the most requested designs), he doesn't know what to do with them. He'll look at you funny."

The reason is old glass benders were schooled entirely in sign-making and the trade they've been putting their lives on the line for seems to be on its way out, Sokal said.

Molded plastic signs are replacing neon and the craft is dying with the men who perfected it.

"We're pretty much seeing the last era of these glass blowers," he said. "The majority of them have

cancer from working with asbestos paper (used to lay the molten glass on), from blowing into tubing that has phosphorus in it and from coming into contact with the mercury that is used when you make certain colors."

On the other hand, Sokal said that very few people below the age of 30 are interested in neon, either as an art form or as a commercial product.

Twenty-three and 21, respectively, Sokal and Chamberlain have only been in the business two years. (Chamberlain previously worked as an actor and Sokal as a professional chef.)

Because neon apprenticeships are hard to come by, they have been teaching themselves as they go along.

"It's been trial-and-error," Chamberlain said. "Neon is a very delicate art."

Practice seems to have paid off, though. Deco Neon's commercial work has sold to such demanding customers as the Limelight, Buckhead Beach and Longhorn Steaks, he said.

But Chamberlain stressed that he and Sokal would just as soon sell smaller pieces to individuals.

Sokal said many people do not even consider neon when they are thinking of decorating because they figure it is too expensive.

"Compared to other custom things you can do, such as an oil painting, neon is really reasonable," he said. "It's buying retail from a commercial company that makes it expensive. They see a lot more money in dealing with the big stuff so they charge a lot for small pieces. We just want to make it where everybody can have a piece of neon and have it at a good price."

Kimo raising money for Paideia, circa 1985.



In 1984 his neon sign for Scoop's Ice Cream won a national award and by 1988 his shop had moved to the Goat Farm.

ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 12/20/1988

It's a Gas: Neon Is Making An Illuminating Comeback

By Gerry Yandel
Staff Writer

The expense of neon sculptures is one of the reasons that Kimo Chamberlain, owner of Deco Neon, a manufacturing plant in the Atlanta artists community The Mill, eased his business away from small art sculptures to artistic commercial enterprises.

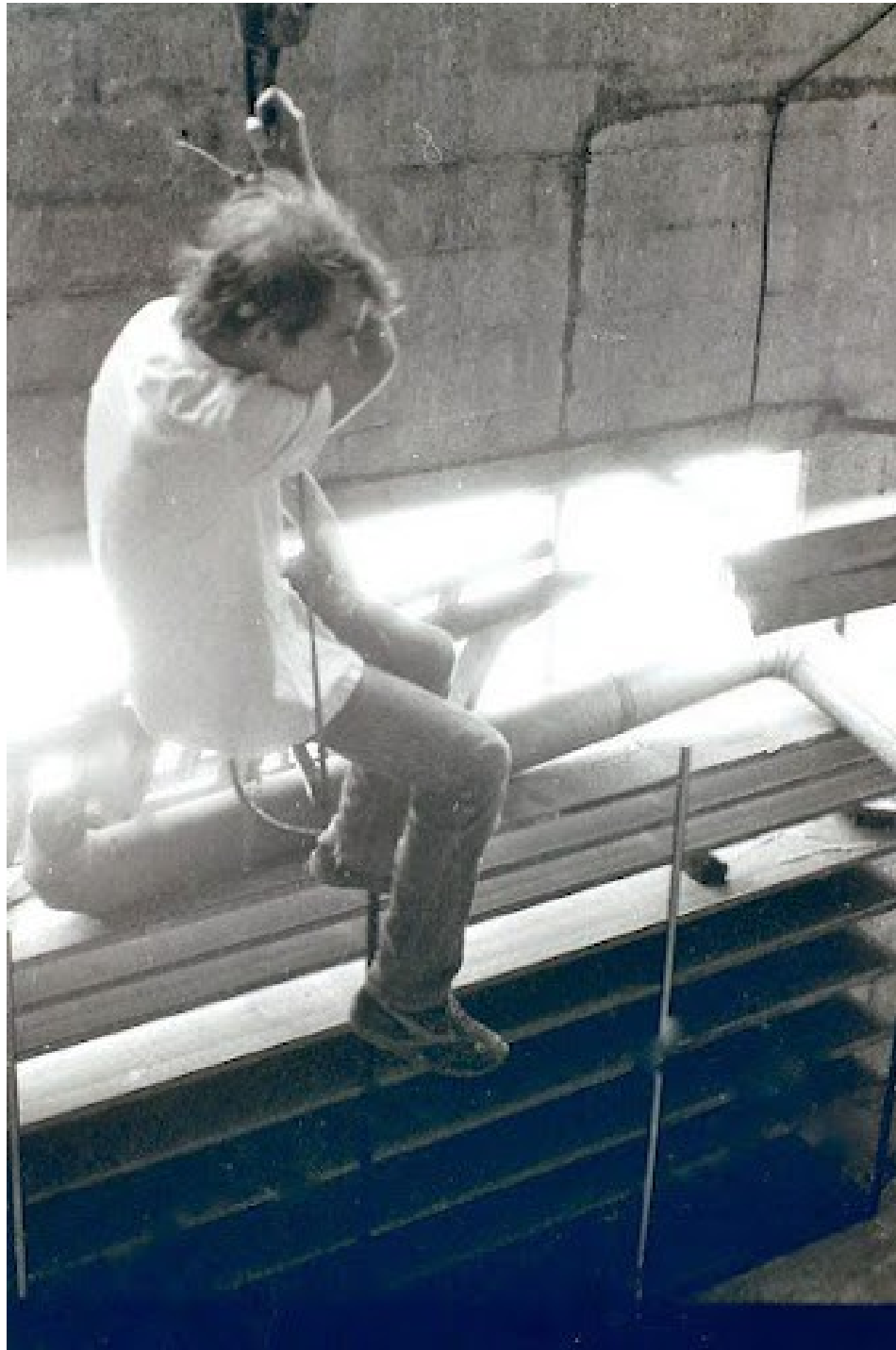
"I got sick of hearing people complaining about how expensive it was to make something that doesn't involve a lot of work," he said. "It's an elite glass."

One of Mr. Chamberlain's neon signs, the animated Scoops ice cream parlor sign at Pershing Point, won a national design award in 1984.

This neon sign at Scoops ice cream parlor won a national design award in 1984.



Kimo demonstrating his flying abilities in the Goat Yard shop.



James Ball, one of Kimo's followers, painting the Fox vertical in 1989.

Deco Neon employee, James Ball, restoring the Fox Theatre's sign, Atlanta, Georgia, July 13, 1989.



In 1990 Kimo perished in a car wreck en route to another party. Fox Director of Restoration Rick Flinn wrote, "A candle that burned brightly but too briefly."

CHAMBERLAIN

Mr. James Robinson Chamberlain, age 29, died suddenly August 7, 1990. Affectionately called "Kimo" by family and friends. Mr. Chamberlain was the founder of Deco Neon. He was a graduate of Paidea School in 1979. Survived by his father, Rodman W. Chamberlain, Jr.; brothers, Rodman W., III, Timothy and David; sister, Ann. He will also be remembered by his dear friend, Lynn Strauss. Memorial services will be held at 10:45 a.m., Friday, August 10, 1990 at Crestlawn Memorial Park, Atlanta. In lieu of flowers, please make donations to your favorite charity. Wages & Sons, Stone Mountain.

Soon after, the Fox published a tribute.

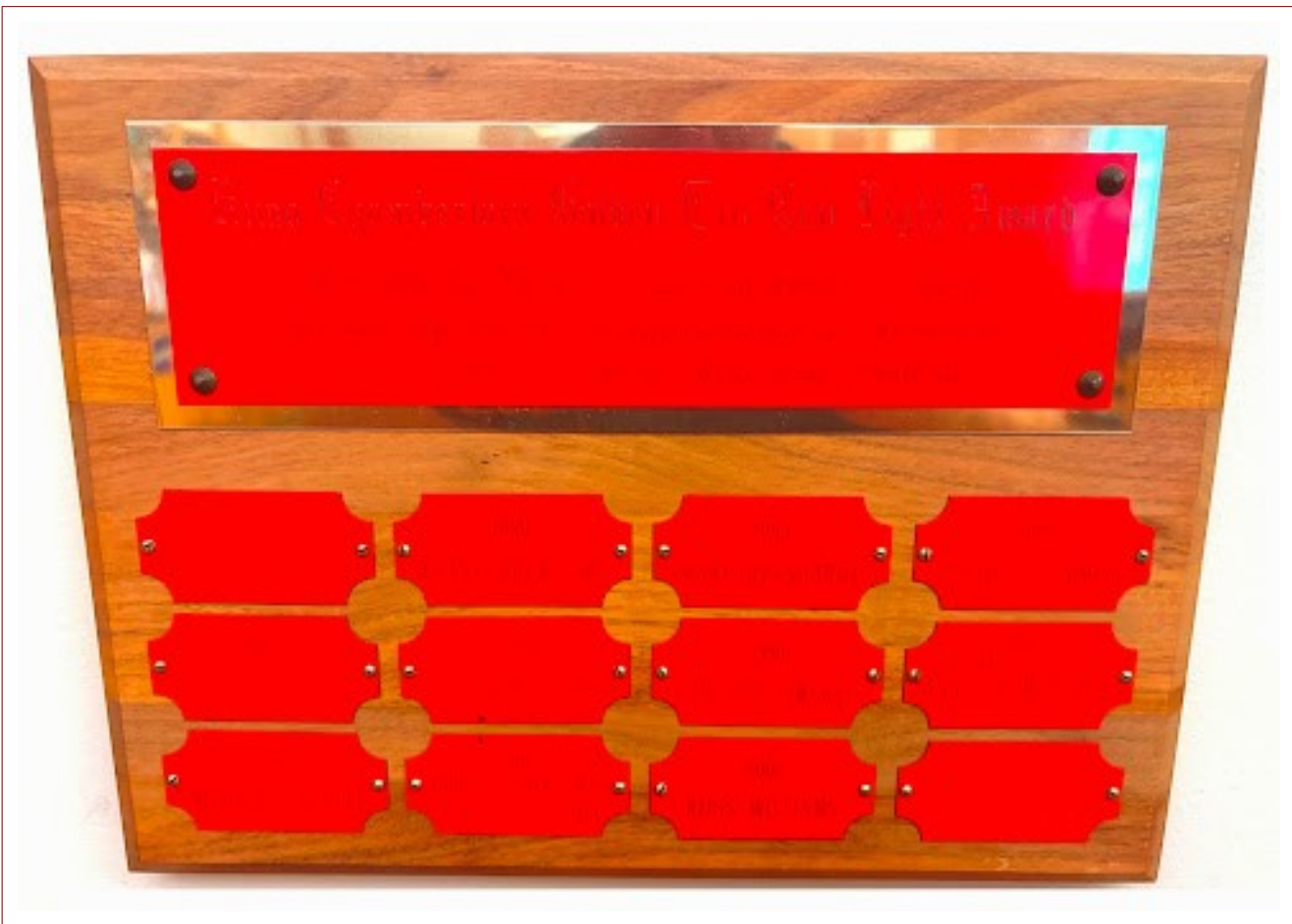
FOX THEATRE MAGAZINE OCTOBER 1990

Kimo Chamberlain

The restoration of the Fox has drawn on the talents of hundreds of people in the fifteen years since the work began in earnest. Of the hundreds who have contributed, both as volunteers and paid artisans, a few stand out for their level of skill or enthusiasm for the Fox. Fewer still combine great skill and great dedication.

James "Kimo" Chamberlain was one of those special few who combined creative talent, technical knowledge and genuine love for the Fox, first as a volunteer in the mid-seventies and recently as the owner of Deco Neon, making extensive repairs to the Fox sign, and helping to restore other parts of the building. Kimo died in an automobile accident in August and the Fox lost a good friend and an important member of the extended restoration team.

Kimo's name and reputation lives on in Paideia's "Kimo Chamberlain Golden Tin Can Light Award," presented to a graduating senior for outstanding contribution to the technical side of theater at Paideia.



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